

CLAIMS

1. A method for sending an article in a postal system, said method comprising the steps of:

causing an identifier to be associated with information in a database;

5 marking an article with the identifier;

enabling the identifier after the occurrence of a predetermined event; and

checking whether the identifier is enabled before delivering the article.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier serves as postage for the article

10 such that the article is only delivered when the identifier is enabled.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier is unique to the article.

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of distributing the article in commerce before enabling the identifier.

15 5. The method of claim 1, wherein said article is selected from the group consisting of magazine inserts and warranty cards.

20 6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

reading addressee information from the article; and

comparing the addressee information against address information associated with the identifier in the database.

25 7. The method of claim 6, further comprising the step of:

signaling when the addressee information differs from the address information associated with the identifier in the database.

8. The method of claim 6, further comprising the step of:

30 maintaining records associated with the identifier comparing step.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the enabling step involves including an indication within a database that the identifier is valid, such that a later check of the identifier within the database returns a result showing that the identifier is valid.

10. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
delivering the article; and
charging a payer for sending the article upon the delivery of the article.

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11. A method for sending an article in a postal system, said method comprising
the steps of:
causing an identifier to be associated with address information in a database;
marking an article with the identifier; and
10 comparing the address information associated with the identifier with addressee
information on the article before delivering the article.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the identifier serves as postage for the article
such that the article is only delivered when the identifier is enabled.

15 13. The method of claim 11, wherein the identifier is unique to the article.

14. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:
distributing the article in commerce before enabling the identifier.

20 15. The method of claim 11, wherein said article is selected from the group
consisting of magazine inserts and warranty cards.

25 16. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:
reading addressee information from the article; and
comparing the addressee information against address information associated with the
identifier in the database.

30 17. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of:
signaling when the addressee information differs from the address information
associated with the identifier in the database.

18. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of:
maintaining records associated with the identifier comparing step.

19. The method of claim 11, wherein the enabling step involves including an indication within a database that the identifier is valid, such that a later check of the identifier within the database returns a result showing that the identifier is valid.

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20. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:
delivering the article; and
charging a payer for sending the article upon the delivery of the article.

10 21. A system for tracking an article having an identifier and a recipient address, said system comprising:

a reader configured to read information from said article;
a database including identifier data associated with at least one identifier; and
means for retrieving data from the database and reviewing the data.

15 22. The system for tracking an article of claim 21, wherein said database further comprises data relating one or more identifiers to one or more recipient addresses and said system further comprises means for comparing the recipient address on said article against the identifier data in the database.

20 23. The system for tracking an article of claim 22, wherein said means for comparing the recipient address on said article comprises hardware configured to facilitate a comparison of the addressee indicator against the identifier data in the database.

25 24. The system for tracking an article of claim 22, wherein said means for comparing the recipient address on said article comprises software configured to facilitate a comparison of the addressee indicator against the identifier data in the database.

30 25. The system for tracking an article of claim 22, further comprising means for storing the results of the comparison of the recipient address against the identifier data in the database.

26. The system for tracking an article of claim 21, further comprising:
means for enabling said identifier; and
means for verifying enablement of said identifier.

5 27. The system for tracking an article of claim 21, wherein said reader comprises
means for reading the identifier on said article.

28. The system for tracking an article of claim 21, further comprising means for
charging a payer upon delivery of the article to the recipient of the article.

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29. The system for tracking an article of claim 21, further comprising means for
recording data in relation to operation of the system.

15 30. The system for tracking an article of claim 21, wherein said reader may read
information which identifies a source of the article.

20 31. An article for use in a postal system, comprising:
an identifier associated with an addressee, wherein said identifier is indicated on said
article and said identifier may alternate between being enabled and disabled in a database;
and

25 said addressee being indicated on said article.

32. The article for use in a postal system of claim 19, wherein said identifier
includes information which identifies a source of the article and said identifier is at least one
of machine readable and human-readable.